701 It is noteworthy that the military ranking of the com-
554 moner-soldiery, which made up the rank and file of the fighters on foot, was not nearly so formal. The fortunes of war, if they did not leave him dead or maimed, could move him upward to lower nobility. Failing to achieve that, veterans could still hope for a modest fief of "gult" land, enabling him to play the "telleq saw" (great man) role over some hapless "gabbar" peasants. Meanwhile, pseudo-"telleq säw" behaved much like the proverbial sergeant of any army, making his men fear him more than any enemy, rewarding them with feasts, in this case of raw beef and medium-alcoholic mead. The only way he could maintain his following of individual-minded Amhara soldiers, each one of whom wanted to be a hero himself, was by continous personal bravery coupled with cleverness in military tactics. But here the similarity ends, for the non-noble chief of Amhara warriors had no pride of a non-commissioned officer; his ambition was to become a real "telleq säw", a minor nobleman owning "rest" lands.

782 Personal bravery was expressed and recalled in
726 formal boasting, a tradition that survives to this day
●521 even for such civilian occasions as weddings. Prior to
535 battle each potential hero would go into a personal song and dance called "fukkara". The ceremonial dance accompanying his boast proceeded as follows: Spear, or rifle, held horizontally behind head, just above shoulders; the head moves in increasingly rapid motion from right to

782 left, while boasts are shouted rythmically. Personal
726 boasts are interspersed with shouts of loyalty to the
●521 emperor ("Addis Ababa! Addis Ababa!"), or recalling
535 past loyal bravery in the service of a provincial chieftain. Fukkara is performed also before the military games of "ganna" on Christmas, and outside the church on Epiphany (Ṭemqät), to express the readiness of the young warriors to defend the faith, and on weddings to boast of warrior ancestors and so impress the in-laws.

The song and dance is also referred to as "dan-
[533] kira " (stomping); to distinguish it from the tamer entertainment song, "ḫafan" performed by female "azmari" who perform accompanied by a violin ("masenqo") or banjo ("qrar"), often recounting tales of renown in ballad form. The "fukkara" in military life takes place before the "joy tent" ("das") of the king, before the "denkwan" (from diwan, round cotton or hair tent) of feudal lords on the march; or, in honor of a successful "killer" ("gedday") of a lion, rhinoceros, elephant or human enemy, in presence of the trophy.

[727] The dance after the victorious battle is called "hoto". It is a simple jumping up and down, brandishing spear, rifle or stick vertically, reminiscent of the Central and West African dancing to exhaustion. It is accompanied by refrains, shouted frequently in response to impromptu poetry made up to celebrate the event, such as "yebahalal jebo" (the hyena will swallow him, i.e. the slain enemy). This refrain is also used before the battle, to defy the enemy and pretend that victory

782 is already assured. It is also performed on Epiphany,
726 to defy human as well as spirit enemiesoof the Faith.
521 Before battle, it was the response of the simple sol-
535 diers, ("wätadär") to the pep-talk ("arraga") given them by the commander, encouraging them to stand their ground.

727 After thevictorious battle, the soldier could look
554 forward to taking part in the royal feasting, the "gabber", and to lording it over the local "gabbar" peasant who had to supply the means and the womenfolk. It is at least part of the basis of the pride (critics say false sense of their own worth) of the free Amhara over subject peoples, enabling evan the simplest soldier to feel that he belongs to the proprietory class. Back home, he therefore despises manual labor, and even in going into battle he used to conscript peasant boys to carry his heavy rhinoceros-hide shield ("gasha"). These boys often became replacements for slain warriors when they could secure weapons, and, in turn, recruited servants for themselves.

411 The typical weapon was the spear (the word "tor" means both war and spear) until replaced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by rifles, though late-medieval muskets and Ottoman firearms were available to a few from the Portuguese period in the 16th century. The spear, some in use as late as the Italian invasion of 1935/6, sometimes had two or three prongs. Sabers were rare, and available mostley to noble officers. They were of the curved, Damascene type. Daggers of

8: Rey G-5 (1910-1920)1935
MP5 Amhara MP5

302 imported toilet requisites of this kind, and charge fabulous prices for them.

The curious custom of stopping up the nostrils is still met with, though I imagine it is becoming less and less common; but one still constantly sees natives on their way to market with a piece of green leaf, or a flower petal, protruding from their noses, and I remember on one occasion when an Abyssinian lady, who had been paying us a visit, was leaving the house, she produced some cotton-wool and stuffed it carefully in both nostrils.

181 Their love of pageantry, display, and functions is quite Oriental, and is well exemplified by the splendour of some of their religious and Court ceremonies.

●521 Amusements are few. The people seem to prefer to sit and chatter; they are great talkers, and whether in the servants' quarters in a house or round their fires on trek, one hears the clatter of their tongues almost incessantly.

492 All Abyssinians can ride more or less, and they are on the whole good horsemen, though indifferent horse-masters. Except in war, or on the occasion of a fantasia, they seldom ride horses; for purposes of daily use mules are almost universally preferred; all but the poorest women also ride mules for getting about.

The Abyssinian saddle is of wood with a pommel back and front and a sheepskin and some padding in the middle, the whole covered with a brightly embroidered saddle-cloth. The stirrups are round and very small, as the Abyssinian inserts only his big toe therein. The bits are horrible instruments, consisting of a ring round the lower jaw and a spike which, when the reins are pulled, sticks into the roof of the animal's

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

words often carry *double-entendre* as a matter of course; when he listens, he is ever on the lookout for latent meanings and hidden motives. As one of my Ethiopian colleagues has said: "Wax and gold is anything but a formula—it is a way of life."

In essence, wax and gold is simply a more refined and stylized manifestation of the Amhara's basic manner of communicating. This manner is indirect, often secretive. Amharic conversation is larded with vague remarks like *Mīn yeshāllāl?* ("What is better?") when the speaker has failed to indicate what is the issue at hand, or *Tādyās!*, an interjection which can mean almost anything. Often, when the speaker is then quizzed about the issue at hand, he will give an answer that does not reveal what is really on his mind at all, and even when he does, the person with whom he is talking is likely to interpret his response as a disguise.

Wax and gold embodies this fundamental indirection in speech by means of the studied use of ambiguity. Apart from its literary and religious manifestations, wax and gold appears in the common life of the traditional Amhara on a variety of occasions and serves a number of diverse functions.

It provides the medium for an inexhaustible supply of humor, among a wry people who prefer the clever, double-edged remark to comic actions or incongruous situations. This includes the wit of daily life—the invention of puns and sly retorts, the telling and retelling of good anecdotes and famous lines—as well as the more formalized humor on festive occasions, where minstrels sing the *sam-ennā warq* verses extemporized by the guests.

It provides a means for insulting one's fellows in a socially approved manner, in a culture which requires fastidious etiquette in social relations and punishes direct insults by heavy fines. *Sam-ennā warq* insulting, too, has its more stylized expressions, as at the drink-house, where one may find persons competing in a prolonged exchange of more or less disguised insults, or in time of political or military conflict, when opposing lords were wont formerly to satirize one another with ambiguous couplets.

It provides a technique for defending the sphere of privacy against excessive intrusion, in a social order that thrives on rumor and gossip and puts most of its people at the mercy of superiors. While vague and evasive responses often suffice to dampen the enthusiasm of the tax collector or the curious neighbor, *sam-ennā warq* constitutes another potent weapon of self-defense.

Finally, it provides the one outlet for criticism of authority figures in a society which strictly controls every kind of overt aggression toward authority, be it parental, religious, or political. Thus it has been a safety valve for certain social tensions, enabling, for example, witty individuals to satirize the monarch himself and still live to repeat the witticism—so long as its subject was himself duly appreciative of the cleverness of the lines.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

games with sticks and cloth, or wooden, balls. The adult males may do odd jobs around home, such as loading and moving bags of grain, or repairing farm equipment. But they are likely to gather at some convenient spot, perhaps at a boundary between fields, and discuss land disputes, arrange marriages, reconcile quarrels, or tell stories.

The daily activity of the Amhara peasant is somber and severe. It is guided by the constant awareness that one must provide for oneself everything he needs in this world. His is a life of deadening exertion, devoid of casual gaiety. Even in his diversions the mood is generally serious and tense.

One of the Amhara peasant's principal diversions is litigation. On days when heavy labor is forbidden the judge's yard is filled; nor is it ever empty on work days. Some peasants spend as much as twenty to twenty-five per cent of their waking days at court. (Because of its importance in Amhara culture, litigation will be discussed at greater length in later chapters.)

Going to market is another diversion. The trip is made by the peasant or his wife, or both, according to the needs of the household. The wife usually is responsible for transactions dealing with cooking equipment and spices, the husband for animals and farm equipment, while either is competent to negotiate about the great common denominator of Amhara life—grain. Exchanges are made either by barter or currency, which in olden times consisted of salt bars, pepper, and iron, as well as silver.

The market provides an occasion for seeing distant relatives and friends, catching up on the latest news of the area, and generally countering the normal isolation of the peasant's life. It is especially stimulating for children, who may be treated to a piece of sugar cane if they are lucky. But the marketgoers are less absorbed with being sociable than they are with the serious business of locating the items they lack, haggling over the terms of exchange, and getting on the trail in time to arrive home before dark.

Finally, the peasant's day may be devoted to one of the many celebrations that constitute the brightest moments in his life. Huge feasts are held on the occasion of weddings, christenings, and memorial anniversaries. Feasts and special festive activities mark the various religious holidays. Indeed, apart from the alternation of the rainy season (June-September) and the long dry season, and the related alternation of planting and harvesting the different crops, it is the cycle of holidays and weddings that defines the pattern of the Abyssinian year. Yet even these holidays have a fundamentally serious tone. Apart from the feasting, they are chiefly times for the veneration of sacred symbols and the real or symbolic letting out of aggression.

The Yearly Cycle

The new year falls on St. John's Day in September. For this occasion the floor of the peasant's home is strewn with freshly cut grass, tall and green after

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

garded as more important than human effort in attaining one's goals. "If a man works hard, he may remain poor. If he does not work hard, he may become wealthy. The outcome is due to fate." The peasant is discouraged from determined efforts to make changes in his environment because of the feeling that no matter what he does, God's disposition is what really counts.

In addition to feeling that innovation is ineffectual, the Amhara peasant tends to feel that it is immoral. Reverence for fathers and forefathers is, we observed, a key element of the Amhara ethos. This patriarchal sentiment informs the Amhara's defense not only of his land and his religion, but of the procedures of daily living as well. It is not good to deviate from the familiar ways of doing things because they, too, have been handed down by "our fathers"; this is a phrase which interlards Amharic conversation.

A number of other, more specific, norms have had the effect of discouraging inventiveness among the Amhara. Experimentation with matter was inhibited by the disdain for puttering about with one's hands—doing anything, that is, similar to the activities of the socially dejected artisans and slaves. Hence the peasant retains the same rudimentary tools for wresting a subsistence from nature that he has used for millennia, and searches about the woods for a properly shaped piece of wood rather than improve his art of carpentry.[16] Experimentation with ideas was inhibited by the anti-intellectual cast of Amhara culture, which discredits the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. Ideas pertain either to the unchangeable mysteries, as expressed in the religious literature, or to the unchanging verities of human experience, as expressed in folk proverbs. Ideas are not entertained as "adventure," to use Whitehead's term—as a source of novel possibilities in life, a guide rather than a justification of custom.

Two factors are especially significant in accounting for the Amhara peasant's reluctance to use ideas drawn from experience and insight for the purpose of reshaping custom. One is the fact that the primary medium for the elaboration and dissemination of such ideas—the written word—was affected by a number of restrictions in Amhara culture.[17]* As a consequence, although writing has been known in Abyssinia for two millennia, it had almost never

* The act of writing was considered to be inherently shameful: like any manual activity other than farming and fighting, writing was regarded as degrading work, the business of scribes whose status was thereby not much higher than that of potters and metalsmiths. Only a small percentage of the clergy learned to write, and those who did were rarely adept at it. The products of writing, moreover, were deemed either too sacred or too nefarious to warrant giving laymen easy access to their medium. Script belonged above all else to the realm of scripture. The awe felt for holy writs was a deterrent against using that medium for other than devotional purposes. The chief private use of writing was for the magic formulas of the *dabtarā*, another connection with the supernatural that discouraged its lay practice. The *dabtarā*'s art served injurious as well as beneficent purposes, and the fear that those who learned to write might stumble onto potent phrases was reason for restricting that skill to a small group of the initiated.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

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> The boundaries of your lips are like the sugar cane;
> No matter how much one sucks them, one is never satisfied.

And in one of the few lyric passages in the first novel ever written in Amharic, the author resorts to the imagery of kissing in describing the beauty of an army camp at sunset:

[539]

> The plain on which they had encamped was vaster than the mind's eye could measure. Except for that hill on which he stood, there were no elevations or declivities; no roots to trip or confound the foot; not a stone to discomfit the eye. It looked like a calm sea that every breeze had spared. The boundaries of heaven and earth were united by lips of love; lip to lip they were joined like the parts of fitted basketry. It appeared as though it would hurt them to separate, that they had entered a vow not to part.[5]

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Talking for the sake of talking is another oral outlet of which the Amhara is generally fond. "In every country," remarked Arnauld d'Abbadie, "the plowman is miserly and sly; but the Ethiopian is, in addition, particularly loquacious."[6] The simple greeting of acquaintances evokes a barrage of ritualistic conversation, a phenomenon which stunned the Englishman Harris:

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> Even two old crones, who are obviously tottering on the very brink of the grave, and who are afflicted with every pain and with every sorrow entailed by the fall of our first parents, never meet in the street without indulging in a string of good wishes which are reiterated so long as their breath will permit. "How are you? How do ye do? How have you passed your time? Are you well? Are you very well? Are you quite well? Are you perfectly well? Are you not well?"—are questions which serve as the prelude to a thousand other interrogatories; and at each response the Deity must be invoked as to the unadulterated happiness and perfect felicity that has been unremittingly experienced since the last meeting.[7]

A number of other conventions provide further opportunities for this pleasure in talking. Anecdotes and gossip are not merely reported, but are expounded at length with the aid of colorful expressions and gestures. Riddle games are enjoyed by adults as well as young people. Men vie with one another at length in a semiformalized kind of playful boasting. In the church schools all reading is done aloud, a habit which persists among many students of secondary schools when they study outside of class.

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A related pleasure in making sounds for their own sake appears in the Amhara's delight in repeating the words or nonsense syllables of his folk songs. On a more refined level, there is his evident pleasure in lulling over and savoring the lines of a choice couplet. We have here for a whole culture an instance of what Brill has ascribed to the poets:

> Poetry is a sensuous or mystic outlet through words, or, as it were, through a chewing and sucking of nice words and phrases. The poet plays with the

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

Mary intervened, placing on the empty side for good deeds a goblet of water which Balaya Sab had once given to a sick beggar out of pity; and the Eater of Men was saved. In the pictorial representation of this legend, Balaya Sab is portrayed cutting off pieces of human flesh with a curved knife in the manner in which raw beef is attacked at the Amhara table.

Most Amhara know some sort of tale about a cannibal. The topic is familiar enough that they are able to invent new ones. One boy told me he made up the following story to explain the nature of cannibals to his younger brother:

> Once there was a cannibal. He lived among many people. He had no food in his house; he was poor. But even if he had not been poor, he just liked to eat the flesh of man. In his house was a big hole which he covered with a carpet. He would invite somebody into his house and tell him to sit down on the chair over the hole. When the person sat down and fell into the hole, he would climb down by a ladder and eat him. In this way he ate all the people in his village one by one—about a hundred people. When he had eaten all the people in his village he returned to live in the forest, because there was nobody left to eat.

The cannibal motif appears in more subtle form in the parlor game known as *gabatā*, in which the aim is to accumulate as many pebbles as possible by moving them around a board with six holes on each side. In *gabatā* the active acquisition of pebbles is called "eating" and the passive acquisition is "drinking." Similarly, those who play chess or checkers refer to the process of taking a man as "eating" him. It is notable, moreover, that the Amhara version of the old riddle about how to transport a certain number of incompatible objects across the river in one boat is posed in terms of three human beings and three cannibals.

Oral sadism is further manifest among the Amhara by the nature of their speech. The Amhara are not only loquacious but also tend, both in manner of delivery and in content of conversation, to be biting and intrusive. Backbiting, insulting, arguing, and litigating are among their more characteristic modes of self-expression.

Backbiting and insulting, and the fear of being the victim of such activities, are the focus of much attention in Amhara culture. Concern about the former is expressed in a number of Amharic proverbs:

> If the mouth lacks work, it will backbite a friend.
>
> If you praise a man once, you will be in trouble if you backbite him later.
>
> If a man is a backbiter, listen for my sake when he talks to you.

Straightforward insults erupt the polite surface of Amhara social relations only under unusually heated circumstances, though it is customary for social superiors to direct a certain amount of abusive banter at their inferiors as

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

155 a matter of course. In the more covert forms of expression, however, insulting
• 521 is a favorite practice among Amhara. Ambiguous language and obscure
578 allusion make possible a good deal of socially admissible, and admired, insult-
[195] ing. It is chiefly due to his mastery of this genre that the Amhara have come
[554] to idealize Alaqā Gabra Hānnā who, in the words of a psychologically sophisticated Ethiopian informant, by "skillful use of 'wax and gold' has defiled everything that is sacred in Abyssinian tradition: this includes Mother, God, Emperor, and Patriarch, to say nothing of the ignorant clergy, peasantry, and slaves. Gabra Hānnā . . . is the summation of the oral aggressive trend in every Abyssinian, of which the *dabtarā* in the king's court and the singer in the drink-house are only mediocre representations."

155 Wax and gold is, furthermore, the vehicle for the mode of expression which
578 Erikson calls "oral retention." Just as the Amhara tends to be tight-lipped
[195] and evasive when confronted by questions he does not feel like answering, so he finds pleasure in stubbornly withholding his meaning from his audience through employing figures and allusions which no one can understand. This may be understood as a passive form of oral aggression. For the untutored, however, the active aggressive component is probably more satisfying. Most Amhara males look forward to occasions when they can insult with impunity, such as in victory after the games at Christmas or in the setting of a drink-house, where their skillfully improvised verses are repeated and sung by a minstrel. The oral sadistic spirit of this latter scene has been captured with great fidelity by a contemporary Amhara novelist. Describing the moment in a drink-house when the minstrel begins bowing his one-stringed violin and gets ready to accept verses from the crowd, he writes: "*And now every one of them prepares a bullet of verse, and gets cocked to fire veiled insults.*"[18]

155 Two-way communication among Amhara is frequently colored by a biting
521 and intrusive manner as well. Amharic conversation gravitates toward a highly argumentative style. Casual disagreement, or even neutral deliberation over a common problem, often engenders a kind of protracted bickering
[691] to which the Amhara have given an onomatopoetic name, "*çhīqeçhīq*." In its more institutionalized form, this argumentativeness becomes litigation, which has long been regarded as the national sport of Abyssinia.

691 As the primary means of distributing land-use rights and of reducing the
182 likelihood of resort to violence in personal disputes, litigation serves functions of unmistakable importance in Amhara society. Yet the frequency and intensity with which Amhara take part in litigation suggests that it is motivated by non-rational factors in good part. Litigants have often lost many times the original value of some item under dispute in the course of pursuing litigation over it through the courts for many years. The language and colorful gestures of the court may be observed among Amhara in their homes or

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

ORALITY AND MODERNIZATION

121 155 571 The preoccupation with orality which appears in their traditional orientations has not disappeared among those Abyssinians who have acquired a modern education. In some respects, that experience has tended to intensify it. A state of prolonged dependence was institutionalized in the government school system. The hiring of most educated Ethiopians by the government has meant that most of them live in a position of waiting to receive their salary—or *ǐnjarā*, as they themselves put it—from the central authority. Thus the image of a bountiful father-figure has become the more firmly established. [643] While in his own person the Emperor has projected an image of vigorous leadership, he has at the same time taken pains to promote this old pattern of oral dependence, by sending gifts of food to students and of champagne to educated officials when they marry; by continuing to provide politically relevant feasts at the palace; and, like the traditional Amhara father-feeder, by frequently reminding his subjects that everything they have they owe to him. This pattern is replicated to some extent in the relations between members of the new nobility and their younger relatives and retainers.

Part of the self-reproach of some of the modern-educated Ethiopians is directed against this passive, receptive aspect of their motivational orientation. Their criticism says in effect: instead of drafting proposals to reform our departments, teaching or writing in order to educate our countrymen, or seeking to understand better the complexities of Ethiopia's current situation, we are far more likely to be found sitting about drinking coffee in our offices, sipping beer at some hotel, playing chess, savoring felicitous phrases, and going to parties where eating and drinking are invariably the main order of business.

Insofar as they are moved to take a more active approach to their situation, moreover, their effectiveness is blocked by a tendency to fall into the traditional oral aggressive patterns of behavior. [578] Their manner of criticizing the government, or certain officials, is frequently one of wholesale insulting. When confronted by a difficult problem, whenever they do not fall back to a posture of dependence on superiors, [521] they incline toward argumentation, *çhǐqeçhǐq*, backbiting, and mutual incrimination. Experts in debate, they are unaccustomed to the arts of creative discussion.

121 155 It is not my intention to suggest that the phenomena examined in this chapter are in total conflict with the Ethiopians' search for leadership. Many aspects of Amhara orality are not in the least inconsistent with the demands of a modernizing culture. Many aspects of Amhara orality would appear to be of enduring value—the excellence in debate and the appreciation of literary subtlety, the preparation of fine feasts and the enjoyment of the table. And it is not necessary for a very large number of Amhara to change their

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

Spontaneous co-operation is most in evidence among the Amhara at times of crisis. When death is announced, relatives and friends promptly repair to the home of the deceased and offer their help. They build the coffin and construct a *däss* (a temporary shelter near the house to accommodate all the expected visitors). They bring food and drink to help provide for the many who will come to pay their respects, and will similarly provide help on the occasion of the big memorial feasts to follow. Like assistance is rendered during other crises, such as prolonged illnesses or fire. Such forms of co-operation set another significant limit to egoistic orientation among the Amhara.

It is in the realm of interaction involving serious interests, touching layers of the personality deeper than those required for the formalities of etiquette, that Amhara egoism is most conspicuous. Here everything seems to conspire against generous communication and concord of opinion. As we have already observed, the Amhara are quick to become argumentative in ordinary conversation. *Litigation* is one of the most prominent forms of interaction among the Amhara. One can scarcely spend a day in the Amhara countryside without encountering litigants, whether under a tree, at a marketplace, or in the courtyard of some lord. A nobleman can never travel about the country without being accosted on the way by litigants anxious to have him hear their stories.

Litigation is, of course, an endemic feature of peasant civilizations. Yet there can be no doubt that for the Amhara this form embodies a basic psychological disposition that differs from that of the people of other peasant civilizations. In traditional China, to take a case of marked contrast, such interpersonal conflict, far from being relished, was deliberately avoided. The Chinese considered going to court to be an extravagance, and the village judge was one of the most underemployed members of the community. In China, parties to a dispute preferred to assemble at the teahouse and to seek a solution through discussion and negotiation. The Amhara, on the other hand, seeks to maximize the opportunity for self-assertion through litigious disputes.* Ordinary sociability among the Amhara is saturated with references to litigation. Current court cases comprise one of the more common topics of conversation.

Beyond litigation, *conflict* is often expressed in more violent forms. Fights with the *dulā* erupt when altercation becomes too heated. Throwing stones is another accepted mode of combat, especially among youth. Protracted enmities tend to eventuate in such acts as house-burning, assault with swords or rifles, and (according to Amhara belief, at least) poisoning.

While it is true that Amhara culture provides means and a certain amount

* Some indication of the gross national significance of this phenomenon is afforded by the following comparison: twenty-seven high court judges are sufficient to handle the litigation for all of England and Wales; the corresponding number for Ethiopia is *one hundred and eighteen*.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

Amhara religious experience. The favorite written literature consists of those genres which glorify individual saints for their special powers and great deeds. The *gadel* depicts the heroic struggles of saints against temptations and persecutions; the *tämher* relates their miraculous feats; and the *malka,* a verse form of some fifty five-line stanzas, consists of a rhapsodic description of the physical features and moral qualities of some saintly subject. The various *qenē* stanza types, moreover, serve largely to glorify individuals through the exotic use of religious symbolism—especially the nine-line *mawaddas,* which means "praise."

While these literary genres are accessible only to the learned few, the multitude also adores individual saints. Each of the saints has his particular following in the population, his popularity varying according to region and to the powers for which he is famed. This idolization has been directed not only to angels and legendary figures from the past, but also, to a lesser extent, to contemporaneous religious virtuosi and outstanding masters of the religious books.

Perhaps more prominent in Amhara life has been the glorification of brave men. The Abyssinian military ethic took the form of a cult of the hero. Personal bravery—not discipline, training, honor, or self-sacrificing loyalty—was the paramount virtue in Abyssinian warfare. The *guabaz* warrior was rewarded by his chief, praised by the minstrel, and esteemed by the populace. His bravery was ranked according to the fearfulness of the enemy vanquished. Thus, in Menelik's day the fanciest headdress was given to a noble who killed one of the fierce Danakil, a less fancy headdress being awarded the killer of the tough Raya Galla. Such actions constituted the one area in which personal boasting was permitted and, in fact, institutionalized in the genre known as *fukarä.*

We are indebted to Arnauld d'Abbadie for a firsthand account of the effect of this cult of the individual hero on the orientation of the Abyssinian warrior, in a passage so rare it is worth citing at length:

> The type of combat which [the Ethiopian] prefers over all others—because it gives him the most freedom to expand his personality—is that where, due to insufficiency of terrain or other circumstances, the chiefs can engage only a part of their forces. He loves to watch the skirmishers of the two armies spy out and accost one another while declaiming their martial themes. Joyously he throws off his toga to clad himself in some military ornament . . . and to mix himself in the widely spaced lines which follow one another and rise to the attack. He loves to comprehend the rationale of the manouvers of the two parties, to be able to judge the blows, to know under which hand the victims fall, to choose from among the enemy to avenge their death, to adapt his movements to the instincts which animate his companions, and to feel the earth tremble under the charges of cavalry which come as a squall